

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 9735

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 1451

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, HO

SUBJECT SITUATION OF UNITED BRANDS VICE PRESIDENT ENRIQUE
LOPEZ BALBOA

REF: (A) STATE 084092 (B) TEGUCIGALPA 1449

1. ENRIQUE LOPEZ BALBOA, VICE PRESIDENT OF UNITED
BRANDS FOR LATIN AMERICA, PHONED POLOFF 0700 MORNING
OF APRIL 12. HE EXPANDED THE VIEWS EXPRESSED TO POLOFF
AT 0100 APRIL 12 WHICH WERE REPORTED IN REFTEL B.

2. LOPEZ STATED THAT HE HAD GIVEN HIS TESTIMONY ON UB
BRIBERY ATTEMPT TO INVESTIGATING COMMISSION THE AFTERNOON
OF APRIL 10. HE SUBSEQUENTLY RETURNED TO COMMISSION ON
APRIL 11 TO REVIEW TESTIMONY OF PREVIOUS DAY AND AFTER MAKING
CERTAIN MODIFICATIONS, HE SIGNED IT. HE ALSO SIGNED
DECLARATIONS STATING THAT TESTIMONY WAS ALL HE KNEW ABOUT
THE SITUATION CONFIRMED THE NAME OF THE GOH OFFICIAL
INVOLVED, AFFIRMED THAT NO LOCAL UB EXECUTIVES OR
EMPLOYEES HAD BEEN AWARE OF SITUATION AND CERTIFIED
THAT HE HAD GIVEN THE INFORMATION FREELY WITHOUT COERCION.

3. LOPEZ'S CONCERN IS THAT HE IS NOT ABLE TO LEAVE
THE COUNTRY UNTIL INVESTIGATING COMMISSION OBTAINS
TESTIMONY OF GELSTHORPE. HE ALSO BELIEVES THAT GOH
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OFFICIAL INVOLVED (MINECON BENNATON) MIGHT TAKE

MEASURES THAT COULD PUT HIM IN PERSONAL DANGER.

4. POLOFF, AFTER CONSULTATION WITH DCM, ADVISED LOPEZ THAT EMBASSY CONSIDERS THAT IN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES INTERESTS OF COMPANY WOULD BE BEST SERVED BY HIS REMAINING IN COUNTRY, AS A GESTURE OF COOPERATION UNTIL THE INVESTIGATING COMMISSION HAS TAKEN GELSTHORPE'S TESTIMONY. TO ATTEMPT TO OBTAIN RESCISSION OF TRAVEL BAN ALMOST CERTAINLY WOULD NOT BE IMMEDIATELY SUCCESSFUL AND WOULD INTRODUCE NEW POINT OF CONTENTION BETWEEN COMMISSION AND COMPANY. IT WAS ALSO SUGGESTED THAT HE INFORM COMMISSION OF HIS PLAN TO GO TO LA LIMA TO AVOID ANY APPEARANCE OF FLIGHT. HE AGREED, ALTHOUGH RELUCTANTLY, TO THE SUGGESTIONS AND SAID THAT HE WOULD FLY TO UNITED BRANDS HEADQUARTERS IN LA LIMA ON MORNING OF APRIL 12. EMBASSY AWARE THAT UNITED BRANDS LOCAL EXECUTIVES HAVE TAKEN STEPS TO INSURE PERSONAL AND PHYSICAL SECURITY OF THEIR INSTALLATIONS IN LA LIMA AND OTHER NORTH COAST AREAS. IF LOPEZ BALBOA'S PROMPT RETURN IS HIGHLY IMPORTANT TO COMPANY, GELSTHORPE HIMSELF MIGHT WISH TO DISCUSS THIS IN MEETING WITH COMMISSION. COMMISSION MIGHT BE AMENABLE IF ASSURANCES GIVEN THAT LOPEZ BALBOA WOULD BE AVAILABLE FOR FURTHER TESTIMONY IF REQUIRED. MEANWHILE, HE IS NOT UNDER ANY FORM OF ARREST AND CAN MOVE FREELY WITHIN COUNTRY.

5. LOPEZ WAS INFORMED OF VARIOUS WAYS TO CONTACT EMBASSY IN CASE HE BELIEVES THAT IT IS NECESSARY TO DO SO. POLOFF EMPHASIZED THAT EMBASSY IS AWARE OF AN CONCERNED ABOUT THE WELFARE OF THE UB EXECUTIVES AND EMPLOYEES, AND WILL TAKE ALL APPROPRIATE STEPS TO INSURE THEIR WELL BEING.
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